

BROADCASTING AUSTRALIA

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ABOUT BROADCASTING AUSTRALIA

Broadcasting Australia has been established with a grant from the Film, Radio and Television Board of the Australia Council. The journal seeks to provide a service of information, news and views on all aspects of broadcasting with a particular, but not exclusive, emphasis on the new radio — public broadcasting (including ethnic radio), FM and other current developments.

Broadcasting Australia is being published as frequently as sufficient material becomes available for an issue and the (voluntary) editorial team can produce it.

Contributions, photographs and suggestions for new regular features are actively welcomed from the broadcasting community at large. This is *your* chance to make this *your* journal!

NEXT ISSUE

- More informative articles about new licence holders.
- News column — Please send your copy urgently.
- Correspondence — Brief letters welcomed for publication.
- More working papers from the Broadcasting Legislation Study.

URGENT NOTICE

The Film, Radio and Television Board invited applications for grants to be submitted by April 19. If individuals or organisations were unable to submit detailed applications by the closing date, it is suggested that they forward an application asking that it may still be considered, or send a statement of their plans and status for the information of the Board. The Board's policy is summarised on page 12; its address is Box 302, North Sydney, NSW 2060.

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intensely local coverage, despite the evidence of current demand. The future viability of public broadcasting will, in my view, depend on attracting audiences over a range of minority interests, not minority geographical areas. The present enthusiasm for highly localised broadcasting is likely to be a passing phase, reflecting the interests of potential broadcasters rather than audiences. In the long run it will be discovered that radio stations exist for audiences not programme makers.

The Working Party's desire to allow public broadcasting to develop in its own way, rather than to lay down a firm and final blueprint from the outset is admirable but I cannot help wondering whether the necessary bureaucratic machinery will in the long run turn out to be a blueprint in itself, rather too insulated from public influence in such an important area of public policy.

It depends on how much faith you are prepared to place in the administrators. In this connection two bodies are to be significant, the proposed Australian Broadcasting Licensing Board (to be appointed by the Minister) and a new regulatory body, the National Broadcasting Authority, whose composition is not clearly defined. The nature of the machinery I find appealing but I would like to see more thought given to the composition of, and method of appointment to, these important instruments.

The Working Party's flexible, non-prescriptive approach seems to have left them when they came to the question of funding. As Max Keogh pointed out in the last issue of *Broadcasting Australia*, the extremely rigid restrictions on advertising or sponsorship that the report recommends are likely to make it very difficult for public broadcasters to generate revenue to cover their operating costs. Whilst the Working Party is prepared to trust station operators in

matters of programme standards and technical quality it seems less prepared to trust their idealism when it comes to the question of influence via the purse strings.

It is, of course, true that a danger always exists that freedom of expression will be abridged through dependence upon particular sources of funds. But this applies as much to funds provided by governments as from other sources. In the long run this freedom will be guaranteed mainly by the ideals, the objectives and the traditions built up by public broadcasters. Nobody, of course, wants to see public broadcasting becoming involved in the ratings game. But the more opportunities public broadcasters have to diversify their sources of income the more freedom they will have, and the more likely they are to survive in the economic sense and thereby make a contribution to broadcasting in this country.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the Report serves a very useful function by bringing together in the Appendices very useful information from other sources, especially about Copyright and costs.

It would be a tragedy if this Report were now consigned to some musty pigeon-hole. It is realistic to recognise that a new government with a political philosophy different from the one that commissioned the report (and whose policies the report writers obviously had in mind) may not find the recommendations wholly acceptable. But the Report represents a serious attempt to come to grips with the problems of introducing a third tier to the broadcasting system in this country, long overdue, and it merits the serious attention of the new administration. Perhaps some judicious reminders from those who have been involved in the movement for public broadcasting would not be out of place at the present time.

PLURALISTS AND PRAGMATISTS

David Griffiths, Secretary, Alternative Radio Association, Melbourne

THE dominant influence of pluralism in the public broadcasting movement at present is evidenced by the first issue of *Broadcasting Australia* together with the report of the Working Party on Public Broadcasting.

Such pluralist assessments of the needs, nature and future of public broadcasting are based on the erroneous assumptions that public broadcasting stations are self-evidently accessible to all who wish to participate and that the failure to participate is attributable to incompetence and inability.

The problem with pluralism lies essentially in its pragmatism. The Working Party's term of office (July-October, 1975) was paralleled by a series of decisions by the Labor Party's Minister for the Media, Dr Cass, which had the cumulative effect of pre-empting the work of the Working Party. These decisions were:

- the announcement that the ethnic radio stations 2EA and 3EA would continue without the results of the experiment being publicly known and evaluated.
- the decision to give radio licences to 12 tertiary institutions without the necessity of public inquiries.
- the suggestion that public broadcasting stations might be licensed under the Wireless and Telegraphy Act instead of the Broadcasting and Television Act.

The rationale for these decisions was that they would not conflict with the eventual recommendations of the Working Party. Thus Dr Cass' adviser on radio, Dr Geoffrey Evans, was involved in preparing the list of 12 tertiary institutions selected to be awarded licences and was able to consult himself as a member of the Working Party.

Despite rhetoric to the contrary, the report of the Working Party must be seen as a product of pragmatism. The real purpose of the Working Party was to:

- ensure a quick development of public broadcasting.
- appease public demand for public broadcasting stations and buy votes for the Labor Party.

- establish a third system of radio sympathetic to the Labor Party.
- establish as many stations as possible before a general election.
- provide justifications for these objectives.

Most advocates of public broadcasting, including members of the Working Party, subscribe to this compelling myth: the inevitability and desirability of an expansion of radio services. Presumed as irrelevant was whether or not the establishment of new stations (public broadcasting stations) would, instead of challenging, legitimise and entrench existing stations (ABC and commercial).

Instead of questioning its assumptions the Working Party proceeded on the self-evident rightness of these assumptions e.g. "the limitations of two existing sectors", "widespread demand for new types of services" and "it is a significant opportunity to extend the freedom of the individual, foster local independence and cultural enrichment."

The Working Party did not think it relevant to ask whether or not there was a need to balance the expansion of radio with the expansion of other services. Would an expansion of radio consume money, technical skills and resources out of all proportion to their worth? Would community groups be diverted and mistake discussing community problems as doing something about community problems? Are there, in fact, already too many radio stations? How do people cope with a proliferation of radio stations? To what extent is radio's role defined and pre-determined by social and economic forces concerned to uphold the status quo? What are the social, political and economic implications of an expansion in radio? Does radio reinforce centralisation or does it promote decentralisation? Does radio expand or contract entrenched power?

In a letter to the Secretary of the Department of the Media, Jim Spigelman, on 20 July 1975 I suggested inter alia that the Working Party should examine:

- (a) Whether or not community radio stations are supposed to be an alternative or complementary to commercial and ABC radio networks, and the consequences for

community radio of the continuation of commercial and ABC radio.

- (b) Examining the possibilities of establishing an experimental period of broadcasting which involved the establishment of appropriate evaluation mechanisms and a review of all licences (ABC, commercial and public broadcasting) at the end of the experimental period.
- (c) Defining and analysing different objectives and assumptions for community radio, the advantages and disadvantages of different objectives, and recommend a particular set of objectives including reasons for preferring that set of objectives over other objectives.
- (d) Examining the priorities of establishing a community radio service, the consequences of such an expansion, the resources necessary for such an expansion and

alternative options for the use of these resources and policy alternatives such as democratising commercial and ABC radio.

An examination of the report of the Working Party reveals that such critical issues are not considered and, instead, the report somewhat alarmingly suggests it is spelling out in detail a policy based on the conclusions of previous inquiries. Unfortunately, the conclusions of these previous inquiries are themselves inadequate, contradictory and vague and the Working Party has simply compounded this legacy. To dismiss the need for discussion of issues, choices and priorities as "abstract philosophising" (Peter Hyde) is to ignore the realities of power and to confuse a transfer of power with a transformation of power.

In the words of the then Secretary of the Department of the Media, Jim Spigelman (25 August 1975) "The Working Group will be judged by the quality of its work."

FILM, RADIO AND TV BOARD POLICY

Tom Jeffrey, Chairman

THE Film and Television Board, early in 1975, convinced that radio in Australia had not been properly recognised as a modern, 20th century art form, requested that it include radio as one of its areas of responsibility. This was agreed to by the Prime Minister and the Board was allowed to include Radio in its name.

The Board's aim was to assist in the effective development and expansion of radio throughout Australia; to encourage new ideas and new forms of radio with a view to generally lifting the creativity of production and programming; to stimulate greater interest and participation in, and awareness of, the potential of radio broadcasting, not only by the broadcaster but also by the listener; and to support a wider diversity of the type of radio available to Australians, with particular emphasis on the rapidly emerging public broadcasting sector of the medium.

In the Film, Radio and Television Board's 1975/76 budget only a small amount of money was allocated to radio, due to a substantial overall reduction in its funds. The Board was extremely disappointed that it had to limit its expenditure on radio, particularly as it so wholeheartedly supported the development of this vital art form.

At its last meeting, held in December, the Board approved grants to several organisations and activities where, in the opinion of the Board, the "seeding" grants would produce greatest overall benefit. It was certainly no easy decision to make, because, due to the high quality and diversity of the applications received, it was all too obvious that the current needs of radio far outweigh the funds available. This applies not only to our Board, but also to other areas of Government who have a responsibility for, or interest in, radio broadcasting.

I include here a list of the recently successful applicants to receive financial support from the Board's modest allocation.

1. Radio University — VL5UV — Adelaide \$10,000
— to assist in the construction and equipping of a studio to be used principally for public access programming.
2. Adelaide University Student Radio \$ 5,000
— to subsidise costs of producing and broadcasting programmes on Radio Station 5UV, but not to pay for salaries.
3. 2MBS-FM — Music Broadcasting Society of NSW Co-op Limited \$15,000
— to assist with broadcast equipment and facilities costs.

4. Community Committee Albury Wodonga — Anne Gorman \$ 500
— to assist Anne Gorman to study the feasibility of access radio in the region.
5. Media Facilities Limited \$10,000
— to assist 4ZZ FM Radio Station (Brisbane) with general production costs, not including salaries.
6. Orange Public Broadcasting Society \$ 1,600
— to foster public broadcasting in Orange and to aid community groups to produce programmes for broadcast over FM station to be established at Mitchell College — subject to Mitchell College being granted a licence.
7. Community Radio Federation — Victoria \$20,000
— a contribution towards their 1975/76 funding requirements, to support community liaison, programme development and for training and innovation activities.
8. Women's Wireless \$ 1,000
— to assist with the development of programme packaging by a broadly based group of approximately 40 women.
9. Tasmanian College of Advanced Education \$10,000
— an establishment grant for the development of a community based radio project.
10. S.A. Media Resource Centre Inc. — Adelaide \$ 500
— a contribution towards its Community Broadcasting Association project.

It must be remembered that additional to these grants, which are given specifically to organisations and activities, the Board is accepting applications for radio projects from its already existing production funds, such as the Script Development Fund, Advanced Production Fund and the Creative Fellowships.

For example, Robyn Hughes and John Blay were recently awarded Creative Fellowships (\$6000 for six months) to allow them to devote their energies full-time to writing radio scripts, and developing exciting new radio programmes. It is interesting to note that this new direction of Board funding received no publicity from any of the media, including radio.

If you would like further information about these production funds, give the Film, Radio and Television Board a ring on 922-2122 (Sydney), or write to the